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SUBJECT: BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE: BADLY NEEDED NEW ENGLAND-ATLANTIC
CANADA BRIDGE MOVING FORWARD

1. As debates about new border infrastructure continue, a coalition of local, state, provincial and federal officials in the U.S. and Canada have been quietly pushing for a new crossing to replace the inadequate two-lane bridge between Calais, ME and St. Stephen, NB. The eighth-busiest border crossing is the gateway for the vast majority of trade between the U.S. and Atlantic Canada. Much of it is live (shellfish) or very fresh (seafood, Christmas trees) and border delays can severely reduce a cargo's value.

2. Plans are moving forward to build a new bridge and inspection area to supplement the existing outdated and inadequate infrastructure. Maine Transportation Commissioner David Cole and his staff told Ambassador and CG about the 27-year history of the project, noting that consensus has emerged in recent years on both the U.S. and Canadian sides that a new bridge is vital if trade is to continue to grow. The government of Maine sees a new bridge as a key component of the state's economic development, as does the province of New Brunswick. At the local level there is agreement on the need for the new crossing as well as its site, with few if any objections raised to the project. Most local residents, in fact, would welcome the diversion of much of the traffic that now winds through and snarls downtown streets on both sides of the border.

3. DHS Assistant Port Director Tim Dannell stressed to us the importance to U.S. security of replacing the existing inadequate inspection facilities. The existing Canadian inspection area is marginally better than on the U.S. side, where DHS officers work out of a 70-year old building. A new crossing will have much more space for inspections and will allow deployment of state of the art technologies to detect suspicious shipments. Additional bridge lanes will allow for the possibility of introducing FAST/NEXUS to further speed legitimate travel and commerce.

4. Funding remains the final major hurdle for the project. On the Canadian side both the provincial and federal governments indicate that money will be available when the project has all necessary approvals. Maine officials tell us that they are pleased with the progress being made toward the Presidential Permit required for the new border crossing and are cautiously optimistic that the Congress will approve the money necessary to get the much needed new bridge underway soon.

HILL